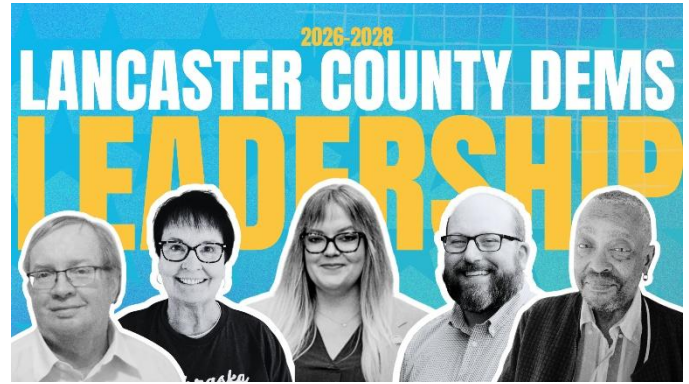


# The Lancaster County Democrat

LANCASTER COUNTY  
DEMOCRATS

April 2026



## Report on 2026 Patriots' Dinner By Hannah Wroblewski

Sold out and record-breaking! This year's Patriots Dinner showcased the strength, generosity, and momentum of a community that shows up and delivers. Together, we filled the room, exceeded our fundraising goals, and built real momentum for the work ahead.

We were proud to celebrate the leaders who make that work possible. Congratulations to our 2026 award honorees:

Outstanding Young Democrat: **Chloe Fowler**  
Salute to Labor Award: **Adam Schrunk**, IAFF Local 644  
Community Outreach Award: **John Yoakum**  
Volunteer of the Year: **Nathan Woodruff**  
James Garver Legacy Award **Arlyn Uhrmacher**  
Chair's Award: **Courtney Lyons**  
Chair's Award: **Trent Kadavy**  
Patriots Award: **Ken Haar**

Thank you to everyone who attended, supported, and made the night such a success. Because of you, we're moving forward stronger than ever.

## 2026-2028 County Party Officers By Ruth Baranowski

The Lancaster County Democratic Party is energized and ready for what comes next. With a mix of experienced leadership returning and new voices stepping in, we're building on a strong foundation while bringing fresh ideas to the table. Together, we're excited to roll up our sleeves, deepen our collaboration, and get to work on a strategic plan that reflects our shared values and the needs of our community. The road ahead is about focus, unity, and action—and we're ready to move forward, together.

The County Party officers, elected at the 2026 County Convention, are:

Chair: **Hannah Wroblewski**  
1st Vice Chair: **Matt Hansen**  
2nd Vice Chair: **Nathan Woodruff**  
Treasurer: **Jim Johnson**  
Secretary: **Thia Hartley**

# REAL CHANGE. VOTE LOCAL.

**United States Senate**  
Cindy Burbank

**Congressional District 1**  
Chris Backemeyer | Eric Moyer

## State of Nebraska Governor

Lynne Walz

**Secretary of State**  
Sarah Slattery

**Treasurer**  
Daniel Ebers

**Attorney General**  
Jocelyn Brasher

## NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE

### District 2

Caitlin Knutson | Jayden Speed

### District 26

George Dungan\*

### District 28

Patty Pansing Brooks

### District 30

Janet Bock

### District 32

Shay Smith (NP)

### District 46

Danielle Conrad\*

## State Board of Education

District 5

Michaela Conway

## NU Regents

District 1

Brent Comstock (NP)

## LOWER PLATTE SOUTH NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT

**Subdistrict 1** Karis Ahlberg    **Subdistrict 2** David Hibler\*    **Subdistrict 3** Melissa Baker\*    **Subdistrict 4** Ted Kessler

**Subdistrict 5** Suzanne Mealer\*    **Subdistrict 6** Alex Johnson    **Subdistrict 7** Luke Peterson\*

**Subdistrict 8** Tom Green\*    **Subdistrict 9** Donna Baur    **Subdistrict 10** Kenny Fischer    **At Large** David Landis\*

## LANCASTER COUNTY

**Clerk** Matt Hansen\*    **Sheriff** Jay Pitts    **Treasurer** Rachel Garver\*    **Attorney** Randall Ritnour

**Clerk of the District Court** Simon Rezac\*  
Kristen Anderson    **Public Defender** Kristi Egger\*  
Sarah Newell

## Assessor/Register of Deeds

Dan Nolte\* | Doug Guess

## BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

District 1: Sean Flowerday\*

District 5: Rick Vest\*

## SCC BOARD OF GOVERNORS

**District 3** Christopher Reid    **District 4** Carina McCormick\* | Logan Niedzielski

**District 5** Joann Herrington Pitcher\*    *\*Incumbent (NP) Nonpartisan*

# VOTE MAY 12

## YARD SIGN DRIVE THRU

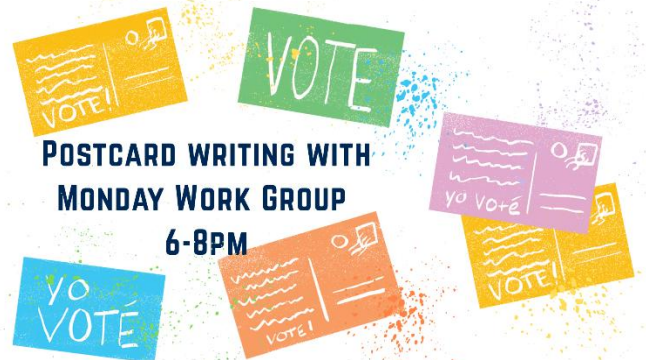
APRIL 12

3-5 PM



## POSTCARD WRITING WITH MONDAY WORK GROUP

6-8PM



## PHONEBANKING EVERY WEDNESDAY



## GET YOUR SHOES READY TO CANVASS!



# Public Service. Public Servant.

By Kristi Egger

March 31, 2026

As a lifelong, dedicated Public Defender, my role and my passion is public service, not politics. In 2022 when I first ran for Public Defender, I emphasized from the outset that I do not see the Public Defender’s Office as a political one, nor should it be a stepping-stone to some other elected office. In 2026, I am still committed to this idea, and thus have never sought endorsements from elected officials or candidates. The Public Defender’s Office should be independent from political pressure, and likewise the elected Public Defender should maintain political and professional independence.

My goal is to help people – clients, the Office staff and attorneys, and our community members. Even before I graduated from law school, I knew I wanted to be a lawyer that helped the people most in need. The clients our Office represents are often at the most vulnerable times in their lives, and often need help due to poverty, substance use issues, mental health issues, and more. Representing these clients has been my life’s work, and now as the elected Public Defender I am hiring and mentoring attorneys to be dedicated public servants.

The goals of our Management team are to ensure that the attorneys and support staff have the resources they need; to supervise and assist them when difficulties or questions arise; to continuously train staff and attorneys to keep them up to date with the best practices of our profession; and to maintain balanced caseloads to ensure that we are taking our fair share of cases, while not overburdening our staff. All this is in service to the mission of the Office: to serve our clients by providing high-quality legal representation. This mission in turn provides an invaluable service to our community.

As the leader of the Office, I work as hard as I can every day to serve our clients, the employees, and the people of Lancaster County. I work hard every day and am a presence in the Office and in Court. In addition to management duties, I continue to carry my own caseload. Currently, that includes representing clients at the Mental Health Crisis Center. I feel it is important for the elected Public Defender to lead by example.

As Graham, I and some very kind friends canvass to voters in Lancaster County – we are working on our 49<sup>th</sup> Precinct so far this election season – public service is what resonates with voters. While some candidates may eschew canvassing for being “inefficient” or not “cost-effective,” it is without a doubt the most rewarding method of connecting with people in the community as a candidate. While we’re out knocking on doors and meeting folks from all over the County, we not only talk, but listen. We hear about 2 or 3 main issues repeatedly.

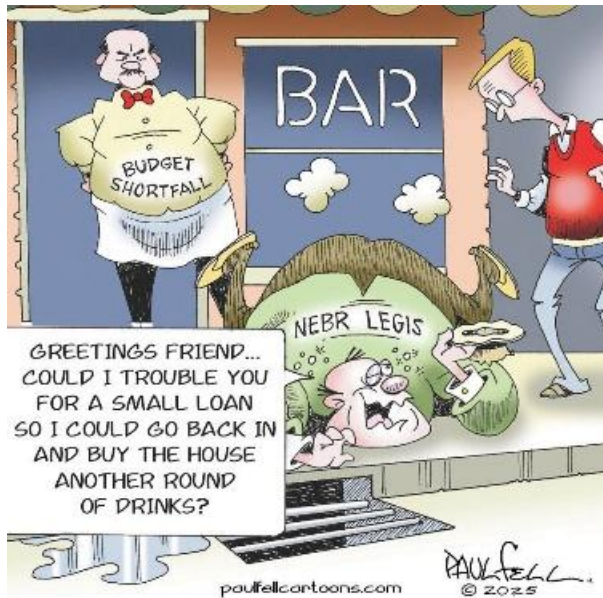
Many citizens are concerned about issues of mass-incarceration and our overcrowded jails and prisons. Almost universally, the voters we talk to want increased access and participation in Problem-Solving Programs and Mental Health Diversion. These programs have a proven track record of success and cost a fraction of what mass-incarceration costs Lancaster County each year. As a member of Justice In Action, an interfaith coalition of people committed to addressing community problems, I agree with their goals and strongly believe that Lancaster County should make Problem-Solving Programs accessible to more people.

Voters also consistently voice their opinions that the Public Defender’s Office should not be a “political” office, but rather a public service. So, when I meet people while canvassing, and talk to them about those dealing with mental health issues, substance use, and the struggles people face, voters don’t ask me to be a politician. They ask me to continue to be a caring, hard-working, problem-solving public servant.



# Nebraska Voters Are Disenchanted With Republican Rule

By Dennis Crawford



Pillen and the Republicans in the Nebraska legislature have squandered a \$2 billion surplus.

The Republican Party has owned the Nebraska state government lock, stock and barrel since 1999. Currently, the Republicans have a filibuster proof 33 to 16 majority in the Nebraska legislature. Unfortunately, for the Nebraska Republicans, familiarity has bred contempt for them among the voters.

According to a recent poll commissioned by the Holland Foundation, two-thirds of Nebraskans believe that the state is on the wrong track. Only 34% believe that Nebraska is on the right track. This is a remarkable finding since 50% of registered voters in Nebraska are Republicans. That means that a significant minority of Republican are dissatisfied with Republican rule.

A majority of Nebraskans are worried about affordability and the cost of living. This is a real warning sign for the Nebraska GOP since Trump and the Republicans promised rapid and fast price cuts beginning on day one.

The vast majority of Nebraska voters also do not share the Republicans' top priority. They disapprove of the federal and state tax cuts that largely favored the wealthy.

From Nebraska Examiner on March 20, 2026:

“When asked about balancing the state budget, 81% of participants said the Legislature should close tax loopholes, as opposed to 19% who said lawmakers should cut programs in health care, education and workforce development.

President Donald Trump's tax and spending law, referred to as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act in the poll,

provoked some concern. About 40% of respondents said the law that passed last summer would be helpful to them and their family. About 68% said it would help large corporations.”

Nebraska voters have many reasons to be unhappy about Republican rule. The Republicans are good at campaigning but they can't govern. Their fealty to trickle down economics has bankrupted the state.

During the Pillen administration, the state has blown a \$2 billion budget surplus and turned into a potential \$874 million projected deficit by 2027. The causes of this shocking turn around are the 2023 income and corporate tax cuts that largely favored the wealthy and increased spending on property tax relief.

The problem is that the state could not afford to cut income and corporate tax rates while funding property tax relief at the same time. Pillen and the Republican dominated legislature has done both and left the state with an unenviable budget disaster.

Another factor is that the legislature has simultaneously gone on a wild spending spree. The GOP controlled legislature blew \$575 million on a canal that has become embroiled in protracted litigation and \$313 million for an unnecessary new state prison. According to State Senator Machaela Cavanaugh, the mindset among the majority of senators has been “spend baby spend.”

Term limits are another factor behind this fiscal disaster. Nebraska has the strictest term limits in the country, limiting state senators to two four year terms. (A senator who has served two terms can sit out four or more years and then run again. This is rare.)

In any event, the two term limit has created a short sighted mindset and many of the senators do not care about the long term consequences of their actions. The strict term limits have also limited the institutional knowledge of senators serving in the legislature. Budgeting is complex and takes a long time to master.

That's not the only failure of the long term Republican rule in Nebraska but it certainly indicates that the Republicans have failed at their most important job — balancing the state budget.

The state of Nebraska is in decline due to the Republicans' reign of error. Young people are leaving the state in droves due to low wages and the Republicans' culture wars. They aren't waiting for it trickle down because it will never will.

Can anyone look at this record and say job well done? Keep up the good work? Let's have 5 more years of this?

Fortunately, Nebraska voters will have a real choice this year. There is a slate of Democratic and independent

candidates who are willing to clean up this mess and move the state in a different and needed direction.

Dan Osborn is an independent who has challenged billionaire incumbent Pete Ricketts. Osborn gave Deb Fischer a scare in 2024 and he already has Ricketts running scared. The GOP incumbent has placed William Forbes on the Democratic ballot to split up the anti-Ricketts vote. He is a phony Democrat with an extreme anti-choice record. Don't vote for Forbes!

Ricketts filed suit to keep genuine Democrat Cindy Burbank off the ballot. Fortunately, the Nebraska Supreme Court has ruled that Burbank will be on the ballot on May 12. Please vote for Burbank in the primary election.

Lynne Walz has announced her run for governor. She is a former two term state senator who won twice in deep red Dodge County. Walz said that Nebraska needs to focus on the economy, not culture war issues.

Nebraska CD-01 has drawn two very formidable challengers to incumbent Mike Flood. Eric Moyer has worked almost ten years building renewable energy projects throughout the Midwest. Chris Backemeyer served his country by working in the U.S. State Department for presidents of both parties. He was part of the team that negotiated the 2015 deal that locked down the Iranian nuclear program for 15 years.

Nebraska CD-02 has drawn six Democratic candidates since it is a swing district and GOP incumbent Don Bacon is not running for re-election. The winner of this primary is likely to be the next member of Congress from this district.

You will find a link below from the Nebraska Democratic Party that includes all of the Democratic candidates running for office and some independents who want to change the direction of this state.

Nebraska has big problems but there are solutions. We are not going to get out of this mess by doubling down on the MAGA Republicans' trickle down economics and culture wars.

Former State Senator Adam Morfeld has some ideas:

"If we were more focused on things young Nebraskans cared about and less focused on going after LGBTQ people, gutting public education, making reproductive healthcare impossible to obtain, and giving tax breaks to wealthy folks, then maybe we wouldn't lose so many young people.

If lawmakers want a guide to keeping young people in the state, here you go:

1. Stay out of our bedrooms
  2. Invest in public transportation, culture, and entertainment
  3. Affordable housing
  4. Invest in childcare and healthcare
  5. Legalize marijuana
- Whew that was tough."

I would add to the list the repeal of Nebraska's so-called right to work (for less) law. Corporate "right to work" laws drive down wages. Nebraska is a low wage state and won't be able to retain young people in the absence of pay increases.

Vote Democratic, and in some cases independent, for a change.

Blue wave 2026!

Sources:

[Inside Nebraska's budget: Why the state faces structural deficit after \\$1B surplus \\* Nebraska...](#)

[With Nebraska facing a structural deficit shortly after a massive surplus, budget observers share their thoughts on the...](#)

[nebraskaexaminer.com](https://nebraskaexaminer.com)

<https://nebraskademocrats.org/2026-democratic-candidates/>

## Governor Frank Morrison And The 1972 Nebraska Democratic Primary

By Dennis Crawford



Frank Morrison was governor of Nebraska between 1961–67.

South Dakota Senator George McGovern began to plan his presidential bid at a meeting at his vacation home in Maryland on July 25, 1970. McGovern and his staff decided to enter all of the primaries and targeted key races in New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Oregon and California. At the time, the South Dakotan was at 6% in the national polls was the heaviest of underdogs.

McGovern further signaled his intention to run for president and campaign in Nebraska when he addressed a luncheon held in honor of former Nebraska Governor Frank Morrison in Omaha on September 19, 1970. His appearance was in conjunction with a twenty state

campaign swing on behalf of Democratic candidates running in the 1970 election cycle. McGovern met with party workers, agricultural leaders and labor officials in Omaha.

McGovern returned to Nebraska on September 6, 1971, where he shook hands at the Nebraska State Fair in Lincoln for three hours. He gave no speeches but he was presented with a “Go Big Red” necktie and wore it while he talked to the fair goers. This was an important gesture by McGovern in a state where football is something akin to religion — nearly everyone follows the Huskers with a degree of intensity unrivaled by any other state. Nebraska was especially football crazy at the time since the Huskers were coming off their first national championship in the long and storied history of the program.

Most importantly, McGovern was escorted around the fairgrounds by Frank Morrison and his wife, Maxine. After he finished the tour, McGovern announced that Morrison had agreed to serve as the chairman of Citizens for McGovern in Nebraska. This was a major coup for McGovern since Morrison was the most popular Democrat in Nebraska.

Morrison later wrote that choosing McGovern over Humphrey was one of the toughest decisions he ever made since he was friends with both candidates. He chose McGovern because he believed the Vietnam War must be ended and Humphrey as vice president had supported Johnson’s Vietnam policies. The former Nebraska governor at this early juncture believed that the Nebraska primary between these two candidates could decide the Democratic nomination contest.

Morrison was a former three term governor who had appeared as a candidate for major state or national offices ten times and had won seven straight primary victories. He was a charismatic figure with a commanding presence and a deep baritone voice. He was a tireless campaigner who never passed up a chance to speak to a voter. His wife Maxine was every bit as dynamic and was a full partner in his career.

Morrison — like McGovern- was a prairie populist. During his three terms as governor, Morrison advocated for adequate employment, crime free communities, and education. He opposed any discrimination on account of race, gender, age, political or religious ideology; national or ethnic origin, citing that discrimination hinders an individual from reaching their full potential. Instead, he believed that individuals should be judged by their individual merit.

During his career he supported the Fair Employment Practices Act, Industrial Development Act, Educational Television Network, and the State Employees Retirement Act among others aimed at improving the lives of their fellow Nebraskans. Morrison emphasized education most of all, which he hoped would quell the spread of misinformation and irrationality. He cited the

Vietnam War, for example, as a prime example of what happens when humans act on emotion — fear, in this case — rather than fact. He favored the abolishment of all nuclear weapons, fearing that they would cause human extinction. He championed for racial justice, and as Douglas County Public Defender he was the first to hire a Black lawyer to represent their 50 percent Black clientele. He also opposed capital punishment as “barbaric, unnecessary, and irrational,” instead focusing on rehabilitation through community corrections programs.

By the end of April 1972, an unpredictable and chaotic campaign had narrowed the field down to McGovern and Humphrey. The intense process had forced all of the other serious presidential hopefuls to drop out of the race. The central issue before the Nebraska primary was the Vietnam War. Both of the two finalists had similar positions on the issue and promised a quick withdrawal of U.S. armed forces from Vietnam. However, the Nebraska primary would largely be focused on more trivial issues.

The issues for the Nebraska primary were framed by a disingenuous attack from Washington Senator Henry Jackson and a column by two influential Republican pundits in Washington. While he was campaigning in Omaha on April 11, 1972, Jackson falsely claimed that McGovern supported the legalization of marijuana. He also attacked McGovern for favoring amnesty for those who avoided the draft. The charge on the amnesty issue was accurate but he omitted to mention that many previous presidents had done the same thing after the conclusion of wars.

Editorial columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak made the dishonest allegation that McGovern was the candidate of amnesty, legalized marijuana and abortion. Subsequently, some of McGovern’s opponents labeled him the candidate of acid, amnesty and abortion. That allegation gained traction and began to erode support for the South Dakotan.

The most effective (and disingenuous) attack on McGovern was an ad that was placed in the so-called *The True Voice*, an Omaha Catholic newsletter that had a statewide reach. It falsely contended that McGovern supported the legalization of marijuana and abortion, swift amnesty for draft dodgers and opposed aid to religious schools. The ad hurt McGovern since 30 percent of the Nebraska Democrats lived in the Omaha area.

Polling by the McGovern campaign indicated that the charges from Humphrey and his allies were hurting his candidacy. Consequently, the McGovern campaign decided upon a change of strategy. They planned to directly take on the attacks and have Morrison act as McGovern’s public defender. In addition, tough television ads were produced that accused his opponents of misrepresenting his record and made the case that

Humphrey stood for the status quo while McGovern was for change. Finally, McGovern was scheduled to campaign in the conservative rural and Catholic areas of the state where the attacks had the most resonance.

McGovern implemented his new strategy with campaign appearances in Norfolk and Hartington on May 5. (Norfolk is uniquely pronounced Nor-fork in the Nebraska vernacular.) Robert Kennedy made memorable appearances in those two small, northeastern Nebraska towns during his 1968 campaign. McGovern had told veteran Lincoln Star reporter Don Walton in a 1971 interview that he planned to replicate Kennedy’s winning 1968 strategy.

The highlight of the day was Morrison’s passionate defense of his friend. The former Nebraska governor stood on the steps of the city hall in Hartington and held up a copy of the *True Voice*, the newspaper of the Omaha Catholic Archdiocese, and called on all presidential candidates to repudiate what he called the “worst smear campaign in Nebraska’s history.” Morrison talked about suing the author of the ad and contended that the organization sponsoring the ad was “phony.”

Morrison offered a point by point rebuttal of the ad. He stated that abortion should be left up to the states, McGovern wanted marijuana possession to be dealt with as a misdemeanor and that the South Dakotan never supported amnesty for deserters.

“Harry Truman and Calvin Coolidge granted amnesty. Do you think Calvin Coolidge was a left winger? Do you think Harry Truman was a left winger? Do you think Frank Morrison would come to Hartington and tell you to vote for a left winger?” Morrison said. “We must salvage the decency of an honest American, the son of a Methodist minister,” the former Governor stated.

A column in the *Washington Post* fact checked *The True Voice* and concluded that Humphrey and McGovern shared similar positions on the issues. Both of the presidential contenders opposed the legalization of marijuana but wanted less severe penalties. McGovern and Humphrey both favored amnesty but Humphrey would only grant amnesty with some kind of requirement of public service. Their positions on abortion were identical — both candidates wanted to leave it up to the states. And both of the presidential hopefuls supported some kind of aid to parochial and private schools.

In the weekend before the voting, McGovern and Morrison, along with eight voters, appeared on a statewide television show for thirty minutes to refute the charges from Humphrey’s allies. The popular Morrison vouched for his friend: “Now Senator McGovern, you are an old and trusted friend of mine from right next door in South Dakota and there are some folks out there who are saying you’re a radical and wanted unlimited

abortion and free drugs. Now I certainly wouldn't support a radical and my good friends here in Nebraska know me well enough to know that. So why don't you go ahead and set the record straight." Morrison then threw McGovern a series of softball questions that McGovern hit out of the park. The McGovern campaign began to feel the momentum shifting from Humphrey to McGovern.

On election day, McGovern defeated Humphrey 41 percent to 35 percent in the popular vote. The final figures for the other candidates were: Wallace 12.5 percent, Muskie 3.5 percent, Jackson 2.7 percent and Yorty 1.8 percent. The popular vote was non-binding and merely a beauty contest. In the all important delegate count, McGovern earned 15 delegates to Humphrey's 7 delegates. It was a clear cut victory for the South Dakota senator.

Another winner was Frank Morrison. He was not only elected as a delegate but he described McGovern's triumph as one of the most satisfying victories during his long career in politics. He endorsed McGovern and campaigned hard for him because he was fed up with the war and all of the unnecessary waste of life and resources. "His very presence at McGovern's side helped rub the sharp edges from the senator's strongly liberal image," Don Walton wrote.

McGovern's win in Nebraska was the high water mark of his campaign. A Harris poll conducted in May found that McGovern was at the peak of his popularity in the polls. This influential poll found that McGovern was within 5 points of Nixon — Nixon 40%, McGovern 35% and Wallace 17%. McGovern had already made several mistakes during his campaign. For example, his stands on amnesty and defense cuts were not popular. The reality was that McGovern's luck had run out in Nebraska on May 9. Up until this point, McGovern got every lucky break but afterwards, he got every bad break.

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This is an excerpt from an upcoming book on the 1972 Nebraska Democratic presidential primary. An excerpt will be published in Nebraska History magazine in 2027. It is a sequel to our book on Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Nebraska Democratic primary.

## **The ripple effect of the Iran war on struggling U.S. farmers: "It couldn't have come at a worst time"**

**By Lana Zak**

March 28, 2026 / 8:44 PM EDT / CBS News

*Vinton, Iowa* — Lance Lillibridge of Vinton, Iowa, has been farming his whole life, and says he's worried for this year's spring planting.

"It couldn't have come at a worst time," Lillibridge told CBS News of [the Iran war](#).

The war has led to skyrocketing diesel and fertilizer prices. Lillibridge says the prices are piling onto an already struggling industry.

"It just feels like the world is trying to take this all away from us right now," Lillibridge said.

The price of ammonia and urea, two fertilizer ingredients seeing disruptions, are up around 20% and 50% percent, respectively, since the start of the Iran war, according to Oxford Economics. The price of diesel gas is up 43.5%, according to AAA.

"This situation is not driven by either the person producing the food or the person buying it," said Scott Marlow, an agricultural policy expert and former deputy administrator of farm programs at the USDA Farm Service Agency. "And it will have significant ramifications for both those who produce our food, and for those who eat it."

Higher oil and gas prices have hurt the major stock indexes, and now Americans could feel it at the register.

"It really impacts the cost of every step of the process, all the way from seed, all the way through to finished product, which affects the price when it gets to your grocery store," Marlow said.

Farmers had hoped to compensate for last year's losses, when farm bankruptcies increased for the second

year in a row. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, last year U.S. farm bankruptcies saw a 46% increase from 2024.

Lillibridge says his costs have already increased 25% since last year. He argues the situation needs to resolve itself before more damage is done.

"If our kids see us struggling out here, why would they want to take it on?"

## Google proposes Nebraska data center requiring more power than all of Lincoln

By Anila Yoganathan,  
Flatwater Free Press

*This story is made possible through a partnership between Flatwater Free Press and [Grist](#), a nonprofit environmental media organization.*

Google is considering building a data center in Nebraska that could require more than three times the amount of power the entire city of Lincoln uses at peak demand in the summer.

The tech giant would power that massive data center — possibly the largest in state history — through a privately built utility-scale natural gas plant potentially capable of producing more power [than the largest power plant in the state](#). And it would use carbon capture technology to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The proposal was outlined in documents shared at a private meeting of a Nebraska public power district in January. The Flatwater Free Press obtained the documents under an agreement that it would not identify the source. The plans have not been disclosed publicly to date.

As outlined in the documents, the proposed project names three companies: Google, private energy developer, manager and operator [Tenaska](#) and natural gas and carbon dioxide pipeline company Tallgrass Energy. Tenaska, an Omaha-based company, would be responsible for powering the new data center, while Tallgrass potentially would supply both the natural gas and transport the captured carbon, according to the documents.

The documents state the proposed project could be online as soon as 2029, though it's unclear how close this proposal is to becoming a reality. Neither Google nor Tenaska responded to multiple inquiries and requests for comment. Tallgrass, in a statement to Flatwater, denied being involved in the project.

The Omaha Public Power District, Nebraska Public Power District and Lincoln Electric System said in statements they do not discuss potential customers until they're announced publicly, noting those proposals can involve nondisclosure agreements.

The proposal could hinge on passage of a bill in the Nebraska Legislature. The legislation, which was proposed by the Governor's Office, would allow for the creation of privately built and owned power facilities to power a large industrial customer. Those private power plants could then hook up to their local power district's grid and potentially sell excess power back to the grid under agreements with the local utilities.

The state's public power districts have endorsed the measure, with OPPD saying it is aware of a potential project that could be impacted by the bill — though the power district reiterated it doesn't comment on specific projects.

Tenaska has publicly supported the bill. The company also has been optioning hundreds of acres of land across southeast Nebraska since late last year, according to public records obtained by Flatwater. The company also upped its contributions to Gov. Jim Pillen's reelection campaign last year.

Kenny Zoeller, director of policy research for Pillen's office, acknowledged that the companies tied to the proposed project have been part of discussion that ultimately led to the legislation. But they are far from the only ones, he said. The Governor's Office also consulted with the state's public power districts, he said.

The bill was not drafted for any single industry or project, Zoeller said, adding that the goal is to make Nebraska economically competitive while ensuring ratepayers don't have to pay for a large user's power needs.

"There have been multiple companies that have indicated to the Governor and his office that legislation like this would make Nebraska a competitive place for investment," Zoeller said in a statement. "However, no investment has ever predicated on the passage of LB1261."

### Proposal could be first of its kind

[Google already has three data center locations](#) in Nebraska: In Papillion, Omaha and Lincoln. [From 2021 to 2023](#), the company has supported about 13,300 annual jobs, and since 2019 has invested over \$3.5 billion in the state's digital infrastructure, according to a 2024 state impact study.

Google's parent company, Alphabet, plans to continue ramping up its data center investments in 2026, spending up to \$185 billion on what it calls technical infrastructure, [according to the company's earnings call in February](#).

Google announced plans to build a new data center on a roughly 260-acre site near Blair High Road and State Street in northwest Omaha in 2022. The data center started operating in 2024 even as construction on the site continued. Photo by Naomi Delkamiller/Flatwater Free Press

The scope of the company's proposal, as outlined in the documents obtained by Flatwater, is massive. The

data center itself, which could require 1,000 to 3,000 megawatts of power, would be one of the largest nationally if built, according to Kenneth Gillingham, a professor of environmental and energy economics at Yale University.

The amount of power would be significantly more than the 800 megawatts needed across Lincoln Electric System's service area in the summer, when energy demand is at its highest.

The natural gas plant powering the data center could potentially produce more than twice the 1,365 megawatts produced by Nebraska Public Power District's Gerald Gentleman Station, the largest power plant in the state.

And if the project does incorporate carbon capture and storage, it could be the largest operation of its kind in the country, Gillingham said.

"In the U.S., there's nothing that large with CCS," he said, using the acronym for carbon capture and storage.

Data centers have encountered growing resistance in communities across the U.S. [Lawmakers in at least a dozen states](#) have introduced legislation that would place a moratorium on new data center construction, according to Good Jobs First, a Washington-based policy center that advocates for corporate and government accountability in economic development.

While data centers can bring in tax revenue and provide construction jobs, they do not provide many permanent jobs, and they can require large amounts of land, water and power.

Utilities across the country are scrambling to meet exponential growth in electricity demand from data centers and other customers.

Amid that backdrop, there is a growing push nationally to allow data centers to build their own power supply. President Donald Trump [promoted the idea during a recent meeting with tech executives](#) as a way to combat rising power rates and stress on the grid.

Pillen appears to want to do the same thing in Nebraska. In his January State of the State address, the governor said his bill would position Nebraska to "win the electricity and AI power game" by allowing those companies to effectively make their own power.

Under current Nebraska law, [public power utilities have the authority](#) to condemn certain kinds of generation and take it via eminent domain, but there are exceptions. [Private power generation from renewable sources](#) like wind and solar are allowed and can hook up to the grid. Nonrenewable private power generation is allowed, but it can't be hooked up to the grid, according to OPPD.

The governor's bill would create another carve-out for private energy developers and operators, like Tenaska, that want to generate more than 1,000 megawatts of power specifically for a large industrial

customer, like a data center. They could then sell the excess back to the local public power district.

While the developer can use any energy source, Joshua Fershée, dean of Creighton University's law school, said this bill would make it easier to use fossil fuel generation.

The power plant would have to be on the same property or next to the industrial user, and would have to be approved by the power review board. The private generator would have to have an agreement in place with the local utility before Jan. 1, 2032, and the customer would have to pay all fees and costs tied to hooking up to the public power district's grid.

The state's three largest public power districts have publicly supported the bill, saying that the utility industry is facing challenges and this bill would keep the state open to economic development opportunities.

Their support makes sense given the power demands needed for large data centers, Fershée said.

Construction at a Google data center near Blair High Road and State Street in northwest Omaha on March 10. Douglas County records show a Google-tied LLC owns more than 450 acres at the northwest Omaha site. Photo by Naomi Delkamiller/Flatwater Free Press

A recent report by the energy research and development nonprofit [Electric Power Research Institute](#) found that Nebraska is one of seven states that is on track to have data centers potentially use over 20% of their total electricity consumption by 2030.

"They don't want to have to build another 1,000-megawatt generating station because they're worried about what that cost of impact could have on other ratepayers, and so this is a way to work around that," Fershée said.

Tenaska also has publicly backed the governor's proposal. CEO Chris Leitner told lawmakers during a hearing on the bill last month that the company is currently building over 9,000 megawatts of natural gas and energy storage in the U.S. It also has reserved more than \$2 billion worth of equipment for electricity generation that could be available in late 2028.

Despite being based in Omaha, the company has limited electricity generation operations in Nebraska, [according to a map of its projects](#). Leitner said he would like to bring the customers the company works with and their investments to Nebraska.

"The customers that we deal with ... have nationwide footprints," Leitner said. "Part of what is bringing us to today is the fact that we're working with these customers nationwide, and they're looking at Nebraska and saying, in the central part of the country, having power and data centers here would be a valuable component to their overall strategies."

### **Tenaska eyes southeast Nebraska land**

Rick Wheatley owns a property with about 80 acres in Otoe County that has been in his family for

generations. Today, his daughter lives on the property, where corn and soybeans are grown. Sometime last fall, a representative from Tenaska approached Wheatley about optioning the property.

Wheatley said the representative mentioned the company was trying to put together 2,000 acres near a gas pipeline for a power plant that could serve an AI center.

“At first he kind of slipped and said for AI, they need their own generating stations for AI. But then they kind of backpedaled it,” Wheatley said. The representative instead told him that the company planned to have a business park.

“And I thought, ‘What do you mean it’s a business park? Who’s going to build out there in the middle of nowhere?’” Wheatley said. In the end, he chose not to deal with the company. However, he wasn’t the only one to get a knock on his door.

Since December, Tenaska has optioned over 2,600 acres of land across southeast Nebraska under two LLC names, according to county deed records. As of March 11, this includes:

- At least 1,000 acres in Gage County
- At least 450 acres in Lancaster County
- At least 860 acres in Cass County
- Nearly 300 acres in Otoe County

The agreements allow Tenaska the exclusive right and option to buy the land from the seller by a certain date.

Gage County board member Emily Haxby said that earlier this year, a representative from the company sat down with her and two other board members.

Haxby said the Tenaska representative told the elected officials that they plan to create a natural gas power plant that would serve an industrial park that could house manufacturing and/or a data center in northeast Gage County. Haxby said she understood that the company is potentially looking for about 1,000 to 3,000 acres.

“My biggest concern is making sure, one, that they’re talking to the public and that they’re working with them, because over in that part of the county, there’s a large population boom for us,” Haxby said. “The other thing is, what kind of industry are they going to bring in? And are other natural resources that we have available to us enough?”

On Dec. 30, amid its optioning spree, Tenaska made a \$50,000 donation to Pillen’s reelection campaign, according to campaign finance records. That brought its total campaign contributions to \$65,000 in 2025 — an increase from the \$27,500 Tenaska gave to the governor during his first run for the office in 2022.

Tenaska had not responded to requests for comments about the land deals or its political contributions as of press time.

“This legislation was written in coordination with Nebraska stakeholder organizations such as Public Power and Tenaska to benefit Nebraska ratepayers,” Zoeller, Pillen’s policy adviser, said in a statement. “The Governor believes that the largest corporations in the world should be paying for their own generation of their facilities, not your average Nebraska homeowner.”

### **Carbon capture could be largest in U.S.**

Google is implementing various strategies to power its data centers. [Most recently, the company announced](#) it has partnered with Xcel Energy and the City of Pine Island, Minnesota, to power a data center in that state with a mix of renewables and a new technology for battery storage developed by Form Energy. In Nebraska, the company [is paying for 423 megawatts](#) of wind energy for its data center in Lincoln.

With its potential project in Nebraska, the documents show that Google and Tenaska could double down on a controversial fuel source. Natural gas plants create greenhouse gas emissions that worsen climate change. [They also emit nitrogen oxides](#) that can worsen public health and air quality.

Some data centers doing self-generation [are investing in natural gas generators that are less efficient than what utilities use](#), potentially creating more emissions, according to reporting by Grist.

A Google data center outside of Lincoln near Interstate 80 and North 56th Street on March 11. The company officially announced the long-rumored project — known for years simply as Agate — in 2023, making it the tech giant’s third in Nebraska. Photo by Naomi Delkammer/Flatwater Free Press

For this project, though, Google and Tenaska could develop a large-scale gas plant that is on par with what some utilities use, which is a big step compared to other data center developers, Gillingham said.

The companies, according to documents detailing the proposal, also plan to further reduce their greenhouse gas emissions through carbon capture, a technology that is uncommon because it has not yet proven to be financially viable.

[Google announced its first carbon capture and storage project last October](#) for a 400-megawatt gas plant in Illinois that will support its data centers in the region. The project in Nebraska could be significantly larger.

“Google has very ambitious net-zero targets, and they have the money and they could do it,” Gillingham said. “This would be a huge investment by Google, fundamentally, to see if it can be done at a larger scale and more cost effectively than it’s ever been done before.”

Much like the overall proposal, though, it’s unclear if the carbon capture piece will actually materialize. The documents obtained by Flatwater specifically mention

Tallgrass as the potential gas supplier and transporter of the captured carbon.

In a statement, Steven Davidson, Tallgrass' senior vice president of government and public affairs, said the company currently does not have partnerships for a new data center or a Tenaska gas plant in Nebraska.

"While we are not in a partnership with anyone to build a data center in Nebraska, we do take every opportunity to share our belief with anyone who will listen ... that Nebraska is an exceptional state for investing and growing in a manner that respects local communities, expands opportunities for families to succeed, and focuses on long-term collaboration to improve people's lives," he said.

Davidson expressed support for the governor's bill, adding that the company is encouraged to see it moving through the Legislature.

If Google and Tenaska do intend to build a data center and gas power plant that is connected to the grid, it will require passage of the governor's bill, which advanced out of committee last month and will next have to come before the full Legislature, where it could face opposition.

During the hearing last month, critics raised concerns about the potential environmental impacts of data centers and the price of natural gas, which is the primary fuel source for heating homes in the winter.

If gas-powered projects incentivized by the bill do come online, that would likely cause a spike in demand and an increase in natural gas prices, Gillingham said.

State Sen. Danielle Conrad, a Democrat from Lincoln, was one of only two committee members who voted against the bill.

She has filed a flurry of amendments seeking further oversight of the agreements that would allow the privately built power plants to sell power back to the public power districts' grids.

"I'm concerned that the governor and the majority of the Legislature are once again going to be yielding their power to benefit a private corporation at the expense of the public and take some first steps to eviscerate our unique and effective public power system in Nebraska," Conrad said.

## Patriots Dinner Photos

Pictures on these two pages were taken at the 2026 Patriots Dinner, held March 28 at Lincoln Station.







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